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An Employer's View of the Church's Function in Industry

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WITHIN recent years some notable changes have taken place in the views of employers concerning the function of the Church in industry. Formerly, it was the consensus of opinion that neither the Church nor the State had any right to function in respect to industry. Industry, we thought, should be free; free, not only as a whole, but in all its functions and all its factors. Competition should be free; bargaining should be free; above all, labor should be free. From the greatest to the least let each run his race—"and the de'il take the hindmost." That was our philosophy in the last century. It was the extreme individualism of Herbert Spencer applied to economics, with the doctrine of the survival of the fittest held up as the last word in theory, and often literally exemplified in practice. Modern industry was largely built on the basis of that philosophy and, needless to say, it has been in numerous instances a grim tragedy.

Certainly, industry could not have been conducted on that individualist philosophy without the world at large being in sympathy, as it was. In point of fact the employers merely adapted to their particular field the individualist theories that were being variously applied to the wider domain of society, but especially in religion and politics. If in religion all opinions were equally good, and in politics all methods were equally fair, why in economics were all bargains not equally just? Thus it was agreed on all hands, and society attempted to achieve the impossible paradox of individualistic concord.

That is all changed now. The world

has lost sympathy with the individualistic idea. We may, indeed, be headed for the other extreme; but whether or not we go as far in the opposite direction, we can be sure that the day of unrestricted competition, of unlimited exploitation, of non-interference and *laissez-faire*, is a thing of the past. The War showed that, and although a decided reaction followed the War, the ramifications of production and distribution have come to affect the public too widely and too deeply for industry ever again to be "let alone" by the guardians of the public welfare. The right of the State to function in this field is no longer questioned by any of us; it is now only a question as to the extent that the State should exercise that right in order to safeguard the public welfare.

The right of the Church is but another aspect of the same matter. Industry bears on morals even more than it bears on the public interest. Its every phase has somewhat to do with human beings and where there are human beings, there are moral laws and obligations also, and there, unless she would forfeit all right in the moral sphere, the Church must have some function. To acknowledge the right of the State to function in industry and yet deny the right of the Church, is inconsistent with any adequate conception of the human element in industry.

INDUSTRY HAS A MORAL ASPECT

All industrial problems have a moral aspect. Indeed, a human being cannot exercise his free will, in thought, word, deed or omission, without touch-

ing on morals. The moral sphere is as broad as humanity itself. It embraces every relation, every affection, every motive and impulse known to man. Where there is an opportunity to do justice or injustice, to show kindness or unkindness, to extend or withhold charity, a question of morals is involved. Where the amount of wages, the length of hours, the safety of employment, is to be determined, a question of morals is involved. The status of the workers involves a moral question; the direction of the work involves a moral question; production, price and profit, each involves a moral question. In short, industrial management and control, because it has to do with human beings, must be considered in all its phases with a view to the right and the wrong of the thing.

Man is not a machine to be geared and run for the benefit of industry, whether on the basis of an individualistic or a socialistic philosophy. Men are no more to be exploited for the welfare of society than for the enrichment of individual persons. It is not enough that the public interest be safeguarded; nor yet enough that private interests be secure. The dignity of the human person must be respected. This does not belong to the State but to the Church, which stands in relation to morals as does the State in relation to the public interest.

The human element in industry requires the Church to function in this field in order to save human beings from the degradation they suffer in being regarded as creatures of the State. Without the Church we have no reason to hope that the concept of human dignity, which is her singular contribution to civilization, will be preserved. Christ said to the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; unless this profound truth is kept alive

in the world nothing can prevent a recrudescence of the pagan thought, with which even the Jews became tainted, that man was made for society and may be exploited, enslaved, sacrificed, for the benefit of society or its favored institutions, among which industry holds as high a place in our modern eyes as did the Sabbath among the Jews.

When Pope Leo XIII in his famous encyclical on "The Condition of the Working Classes" restated in terms of modern application the time-honored teaching of the Church that it is immoral to treat human beings as mere instruments for producing wealth, whether for a few capitalists or for society at large, the whole current of modern thought pertaining to industry began to change. Most everyone will now admit that the methods prevailing in industry at that time were unjust, if not, indeed, inhuman. Not, perhaps, so inhuman as the worst forms of slavery, but scarcely to be preferred over the best form of that ancient institution. The underlying philosophy of both was that nature had ordained that some persons in society should exploit others for their own benefit. Nothing short of the world-wide influence of the Church, exerted at the propitious time when the reactions from materialism had set in, could have changed the current of thought then prevalent, without carrying things to the other extreme, which the wave of radicalism fast rising gave earnest promise of doing.

First, then, it stands in the nature of things that the Church should function in respect to industry because industry has a moral bearing that is wide and deep, and it is in the moral sphere that the Church exercises the fullest competence. Wherever there is a moral question, there the Church should function.

THE CHURCH IS THE TEACHER

Again, the Church should function in this field because her teaching has been the one great force in humanizing civilization, in lifting mankind out of the degradation of pagan thought toward the dignity of the Christian ideal, and it would be an incongruous thing, with the ramifications of industry as extensive and vital as they are, to exclude from this field the one force that has demonstrated its power to lead the human race on to higher planes.

The workingman should welcome the Church's functioning in industry because the strength of her influence is his one hope to improve without violence his status to the point where not only economic justice but social justice as well, will be within his reach. The employer should welcome it because, first, it is right and, second, it is all that can stay the swing of the pendulum to the other extreme where, as today in Russia, the once favored classes will be trampled down and destroyed. Society as a whole should welcome it because with the Church teaching and the State governing in well-balanced harmony society is organized on the best possible plan, the most intelligent, the most tranquil, the most lasting.

The Church is, of course, preëminently the teacher. She is equipped to teach the world. She has the experience, the heart, the vision. She knows history. She knows men. She has been with them, has studied them for centuries. She is the incomparable expert in human nature. Her specialty is religion, but religion was made for man, and a religion that does not enter into his daily life can be of no great benefit to him. A religion that does not reach man's heart can have no appreciable effect on his conduct. A religion that does not take in the whole moral sphere cannot adequately deal

with any moral problem. Moral values are not delimited by zones or occupational lines; they all run into one another; and the moral teacher that does not assert the right to function in such an important sphere of human activity as modern industry, acknowledges its own incompetence.

There is no necessity here to discuss man's need of religion, which alone has lifted the race out of the pits where the first man born slew his brother; which alone can search man's conscience and train his will to better things. It is enough to say that without the Church to teach us the right and the wrong of human conduct in all the relations of men, it is left only for the State, by the power of numbers, to establish society on the basis that for the moment is in most popular demand.

In the light of history and with human nature what it is in the raw, that alternative holds out a prospect which must cause even selfish groups and persons to be willing for the Church to exert her moral influence in the field of industry. There is no wrong however great that the untaught conscience of the people has not in the past condoned, no cruelty however deep that popular majorities under the spell of some inflamed propagandist have not approved. Neither barricades nor bullets are adequate to check an aroused populace; and as for law, this is effective only to the extent that it has the sanction of the common conscience. The power that can lay its edicts on man's conscience alone can save him in that hour when the elemental traits of human nature break through the crust of civilized conventions. That power is the Church, the great moral teacher of mankind, which should have an active function in all divisions of society, and not least in that field where so many men and women spend their lives.